

## **SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES**

### **1. Definition**

“Specific Learning Disability” The term Specific Learning Disability means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, and that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Such term includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities (e.g., visual processing), brain injury that is not caused by an external physical force, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific Learning Disability does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment; Mental Retardation; Emotional Disturbance; limited English proficiency; environmental or cultural disadvantage.

### **2. Evaluation**

The characteristics as identified in the Specific Learning Disabilities Definition are present.

- a. Evaluation for Specific Learning Disabilities shall meet the following nine standards:
  - (1) evidence that underachievement in a child was not due to a lack of appropriate (the child’s State-approved grade level standards) scientifically-validated instruction (instruction that has been researched using rigorous, well-designed, objective, systematic, and peer-reviewed studies) in reading and math;
  - (2) evidence that prior to, or as a part of, the referral process, the child was provided appropriate instruction in general education settings;
  - (3) evidence that instruction was delivered by appropriately trained personnel;
  - (4) data-based documentation of repeated formal assessment of student progress during instruction (progress monitoring data) that has been collected and recorded frequently (a minimum of one data point per week in each area of academic concern);
  - (5) evidence that progress monitoring data was provided to the child’s parents at a minimum of once every four and one-half (4.5) weeks;
  - (6) evidence that, when provided scientifically-validated instruction and appropriate interventions and learning experiences, the child did not achieve at a proficiency level or rate consistent with State-approved grade level standards or with the child’s age, in one or more of the following areas;
    - (a) oral expression,
    - (b) listening comprehension,
    - (c) written expression,

- (d) basic reading skills,
  - (e) reading fluency skills,
  - (f) reading comprehension,
  - (g) mathematics calculation, and
  - (h) mathematics problem solving;
- (7) evidence that the child exhibits a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance, achievement, or both, relative to State-approved grade-level standards, the child's age, or intellectual development that is determined to be relevant to the identification of a Specific Learning Disability (as defined in the definition of Specific Learning Disabilities); and
- (8) evidence that the child's learning problems are not primarily due to Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Orthopedic Impairment; Mental Retardation; Emotional Disturbance; limited English proficiency; environmental or cultural factors; motivational factors; or situational trauma (i.e., temporary, sudden, or recent change in the child's life);
- b. A child whose characteristics meet the definition of a child having a Specific Learning Disability may be identified as a child eligible for Special Education services if:
- (1) all the requirements of standards 2.a.(1) – 2.a. (8) have been met;
  - (2) the evidence and documentation is evaluated and results verify that the characteristics exhibited by the child meet the definition of a Specific Learning Disability; and
  - (3) documentation, including observation and/or assessment, of how Specific Learning Disabilities adversely impacts the child's educational performance in his/her learning environment.

#### Evaluation Procedures

Evaluation and identification of students with Specific Learning Disabilities may be conducted using *either* a State-Approved Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI) Method of Identification *or* the State-Approved IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Method of Identification as described in Procedural Addenda A and B, respectively, of the Specific Learning Disabilities Standards.

#### Evaluation Participants

Information shall be gathered from the following persons in the evaluation of a Specific Learning Disability:

- (1) the parent;
- (2) the child's general education classroom teacher;
- (3) a licensed special education teacher; a licensed school psychologist, licensed psychological examiner, licensed senior psychological examiner, or licensed psychologist;

- (4) at least one person qualified to conduct an individual diagnostic evaluation {e.g., licensed special education teacher, licensed speech-language teacher/pathologist or licensed remedial reading teacher/specialist}; and
- (5) other professional personnel as indicated (e.g., Optometrist or Ophthalmologist).

**PROCEDURAL ADDENDUM A**  
**The Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI) Method of Identification**

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**1. Definition**

RTI is a set of systematic and data-based instructional processes for identifying, defining, and resolving students' academic and/or behavioral problems. RTI is a multi-tiered approach that provides services and interventions to struggling learners at increasing levels of intensity. The RTI approach must use a systematic process with a continuum of intervention options to determine if the child responds to scientific, research-based interventions.

**2. Evaluation**

- (1) A Response to Intervention Method of Identification may be used for the identification of students with Specific Learning Disabilities when the following requirements are met:
  - (a) districts and/or schools must receive state approval from the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education, Office of Assessment, 710 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, Tennessee, 37243 before using the RTI Method of Identification for Specific Learning Disabilities; and
  - (b) the submitted plan must include, at a minimum, completion of the Tennessee RTI Action Plan template at the Division of Special Education website on the Special Education Assessment page:  
<http://state.tn.us/education/speced/seassessment.shtml>.
  - (c) The Tennessee RTI Action Plan follows the standards of excellence presented in the IRIS Center for Training Enhancements, RTI Online Modules located at <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/resources.html>, particularly [Module 4: RTI: Putting it all Together](#), and [Module 5: RTI: Considerations for School Leaders](#).
- (2) A State-approved RTI Method of Identification must include:
  - (a) high-quality instruction and positive behavioral supports provided by appropriately trained personnel;
  - (b) scientifically-validated interventions appropriate for suspected area of disability;
  - (c) frequent, ongoing progress monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions and inform instruction that includes:
    - i. data-based documentation to illustrate the student's response to the intervention(s);
    - ii. data-based documentation of intervention integrity, fidelity to design, and intensity; and

- iii. periodic collaborative student support team review of student outcome data taking into account Local Education Agency-determined decision points.
- (d) documentation of parental input; and, as appropriate, the child's input; and
- (e) documentation that the child's learning problems are not primarily due to:
  - i. lack of appropriate instruction in reading and math;
  - ii. limited English proficiency;
  - iii. Visual Impairment;
  - iv. Hearing Impairment;
  - v. Orthopedic Impairment;
  - vi. Mental Retardation;
  - vii. Emotional Disturbance;
  - viii. environmental or cultural factors;
  - ix. motivational factors; and
  - x. situational trauma.
- (3) Evaluation using a State-approved RTI Method of Identification must include:
  - (a) data demonstrating the student's non-responsiveness to scientifically-validated interventions supported by comprehensive, curriculum-based data;
  - (b) documentation that rules out other disabilities or factors including the administration of a linguistically and culturally-fair individual, standardized scale of intelligence (short-form measures of cognitive ability established by the State as valid and reliable may be used); and
  - (c) a comprehensive psycho-educational evaluation when the assessment results from the previous standards listed in (3)(a) and (3)(b) are inconclusive.

**PROCEDURAL ADDENDUM B**  
**The IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Method of Identification**

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**1. Definition**

The IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Method of Identification concludes there is a severe discrepancy between educational performance and predicted achievement that is based on the best measure of cognitive ability. A severe discrepancy between educational performance and predicted achievement that is based on the best measure of cognitive ability is defined by at least 1.5 Standard Deviations (considering Standard Error of the Estimate) when utilizing regression-based discrepancy analyses described in Tennessee's guidelines for evaluation of Specific Learning Disabilities in the SLD Assessment Resource Packet: <http://www.state.tn.us/education/speced/seassessment/>.

**2. Evaluation**

- (1) The IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Method of Identification must include documentation that all the standards in the Specific Learning Disabilities Evaluation Section 2.a.(1) – 2.a.(8) and Evaluation Section 2.b.(1) through 2.b.(3) have been met.
- (2) Evaluation using the IQ/Achievement Discrepancy Method of Identification must also include:
  - (a) an individual standardized multi-factored assessment of cognitive ability;
  - (b) an individual standardized assessment of academic achievement;
  - (c) documentation of performance on all of the following:
    - i. group or individually administered achievement tests; and
    - ii. criterion-referenced assessments or curriculum/performance-based assessments;
  - (d) at least two documented observations of the child's educational performance in the general education classroom including:
    - i. an indirect observation by the child's general education classroom teacher, and
    - ii. a direct observation by a professional other than the person providing the indirect observation (observations shall address the child's academic behaviors, academic performance, and relevant work samples);
  - (e) documentation of parental input; and, as appropriate, the child's input; and
  - (f) documentation that the child's learning problems are not primarily due to:
    - i. lack of appropriate instruction in reading and math;

- ii. limited English proficiency;
- iii. Visual Impairment;
- iv. Hearing Impairment;
- v. Orthopedic Impairment;
- vi. Mental Retardation;
- vii. Emotional Disturbance;
- viii. environmental or cultural factors;
- ix. motivational factors; and
- x. situational trauma.